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ABSTRACT

This publication contains guidelines for fostering cooperation between the business and professional community and a community adult learning center. It is based on a program in operation at the Great Neck (New York) Adult Learning Center. The guidelines for initiating and conducting the program cover the following processes: selection of the business and industry liaison; initial planning; getting leads; the initial contact; securing commitments and following up; and recording, reporting and evaluating the cooperative program. The program guidelines stress the mutual benefits of such a plan in two ways. For the adult center, job information and development services will attract more students to the center, helping to maintain attendance in classes and increase motivation toward achievement of the educational credentials and skills necessary to get, hold, and advance in a good job. For the business community, access to reliable workers and favorable public relations may increase business volume. A section on resource materials completes the guide. (KC)

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WORKING WITH BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

BY ELLEN F. STEMPEL,

LIFE SKILLS COORDINATOR

GREAT NECK ADULT LEARNING CENTERS

GREAT NECK, NEW YORK

Written as a consultant for the New York State Education Department, Division of Continuing Education, July, 1982. The project was funded under a Federal Community Education Grant.

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Foreword

Ellen F. Stempel, the writer of this publication, has been highly successful in creating a working relationship with the business community in Great Neck, New York. Working for the Adult Learning Center in that community, she has been able to create an atmosphere which not only has gained the support of the community for the adult program, but has been beneficial both to the students at the Center and the local business community as well. We believe that the methods she employs to achieve these ends are replicable in varying degree in most other communities.

We wish to express our appreciation to Elizabeth Buckley, Coordinator of the Clover Drive Adult Center for her cooperation in this project as well as Ellen F. Stempel, Life Skills Educator, who wrote the manuscript for this publication. William Jonas, Associate in the Bureau of Community and Continuing Education worked with the writer in developing the manuscript and prepared it for publication.

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Purpose

Every adult learning center serves a community. The reverse can and should also be true. The community and the schools have an obligation to serve each other. The community, particularly the business community, can serve the adult learning center in many ways. For ABE programs, which include ESL and GED, the community can best broaden the ability of the school to serve its population by providing the means for adult learners to accomplish their goals. The primary goals of most adult learners involve advancement both educationally and vocationally.

The business portion of the community can play a critically important role by providing contacts, occupational information, and job opportunities. Professional and business persons can address students at career programs, host field trips, provide work internships and on-the-job training, serve as guest speakers at employability skills workshops, and become a job development resource. They can assist in program and curriculum planning and may provide supportive funds.

The initiative for encouraging business and industry to work cooperatively with the adult center must come from a selected staff member at the center. It must be an ongoing effort which is carefully planned and executed. Suggestions for the implementation of such a plan will be presented here, and can be easily followed or adapted for use in most communities which have adult programs.

For those continuing education centers offering occupational programs, the value of initiating and maintaining a dialog with local business, industry, and labor unions is quite obvious. There is no better method for "reality testing" of programs and methods. Are we training people in marketable skills? Are our training methods and equipment effective? Is there a need for new programs? Such a dialog may lead not only to accurate information but to possible funds for proposed occupational training classes or employability skills programs.

Where learning centers primarily offer ABE, GED, and ESL programs, the value of linkages with local business and industry is less apparent. The director of such a program may question the cost effectiveness of stretching the duties and responsibilities of a busy professional staff to include the time for reaching out into the community in this way. Yet the time and effort involved is well spent in terms of the benefits to be reaped by all concerned.

For the adult center, job information and development services will attract more students to the center, help maintain attendance in classes, and increase motivation towards achievement of the educational credentials and skills necessary to get, hold, and advance in a good job. For the student who can use the adult center as a source of job information or placement, upward economic mobility is facilitated. In addition, personal satisfaction and confidence are often increased. For the school district, close relationships between school and community will work to maintain good public relations and promote cooperation on many levels.

For the business community, access to reliable workers who reside in the area is desirable. Involvement with the school district is an excellent public relations strategy, and the resulting publicity may increase business volume. In addition, efforts to assist economically disadvantaged students to obtain jobs may result in their removal from the public assistance rolls. This benefits the taxpayer as well as the student.

A program of cooperation between the adult center and the business community has been successful in operation for several years at the Great Neck Adult Learning Centers in Great Neck, New York. Although the center is located in a residential community, there are a few large local employers. There are a variety of small businesses and many professional offices. Two of the largest employers in the area are hospitals. Both hospitals provide facilities on the work site for teachers and equipment, from the Great Neck learning centers. Hospital employees and residents of surrounding areas may study to prepare for the GED examination.

Many business representatives and professional persons have been asked to participate in a "live bank" of vocational information for students. Many of these contact persons have signed cards (see section on forms and records) which state that they have agreed to speak individually, by appointment, with students seeking career information in their particular area of expertise.

Business and industry contacts are kept up-to-date in their information about the changing services offered at the center. Employers or personnel officers often will refer employees to the adult center, and will urge them to improve their skills and/or educational credentials by attending classes during non-working hours. This demonstration of personal interest in the employees will help to improve employer-employee relationships, improve morale, and enable their employees to progress in their jobs.

Guidelines for initiating and conducting the program

Selection of the liaison

It is important that one staff member be responsible for the conduct of this program. That person should be well organized, and comfortable in dealing with people. Initiative and creativity are essential. Prior experience in the business world will help in developing an empathic relationship with persons in the business community. It is helpful if the person selected for this responsibility is well acquainted with the community and surrounding area. It is important to know what businesses and industries exist, which are expanding, and what is coming into the area.

The liaison can be an adult basic education coordinator, a continuing education director, a life skills educator, a counselor, a public relations person, a teacher who has special talent in working with people or anyone who understands the program and has the qualifications described above. In small programs with limited staff time, liaison activities will not be as extensive as they will be in larger programs. However, it is important to do as much as possible within these limitations. Often the help of a volunteer from the community can be enlisted to assist the liaison.

As an enthusiastic and personable representative of the adult learning center, the liaison must be able to "sell" the center's services and point out the advantages of establishing a cooperative relationship. Specific techniques for accomplishing this task will be included in the guidelines. Should the responsibility for this program be changed at any time, a smooth transition is important. The new liaison should be introduced to the community contact persons so that relationships which have been nurtured over a long period of time will not be lost.

Initial Planning

It is essential for the liaison to work closely with the administrator to develop policy recommendations, delineate the goals of the program, and devise a plan for its implementation subject to Board of Education approval. Initial planning sessions should consider the following:

- How the services of the learning center should be described:

  - oral presentations
  - printed brochures
  - letters
  - flyers
  - posters
  - press releases

  Any sensitive questions or areas of potential controversy should be discussed with the administration.

- A flexible time plan for the liaison with large blocks of time initially allocated for:

  - surveying the community
  - getting leads
  - making visits or telephone calls to potential community contacts
  - writing letters
  - designing brochures
  - other developmental activities

  As the program gains momentum later in the year, the time required for these activities will decrease. However, continued effort is necessary to strengthen old relationships and build up new contacts. There must be time for pre-screening applicants for jobs developed through the program and for follow-up of those who are placed.

- Plans to publicize cooperative efforts which result from this program. If, for example, representatives of local industry speak at a workshop, host a field trip, or subsidize a program, every effort should be made to acknowledge their assistance. In addition to a thank you letter from the administrator, articles should be written for school publications and press releases for local newspapers. This will not only enhance the public image of the cooperative industry, but will be excellent "ammunition" for future efforts to expand contacts.

- Plans for record keeping and reports to administration.

Getting leads

Some sources for developing a list of potential community contacts are as follows:

- Local newspapers. Read the advertisements, the want-ads, and news articles. News articles about a company will often mention the name of an executive. For example, if Mr. Z has just been promoted to a position of personnel manager in a local department store, or has just opened a new French restaurant in town, you can telephone and ask to speak with him by name.

- Chamber of Commerce or Merchant's Association. Call the office of the president of the organization and arrange for an appointment. (See discussion of initial contact.)

- Fraternal organizations or community service clubs (e.g., Kiwanis, Civitan, Rotary). Follow a similar procedure to the one above.

- Canvassing the community and surrounding areas. Drive through commercial areas, listing potential contacts and noting new businesses moving in or expanding.

- Telephone Directory. Make listings from the yellow pages.

- The Association of Business and Commerce Directory for your county.

The liaison should always be on the alert for networking possibilities. For example, learning center students who work in the community may be asked to tell about their work. The liaison may develop contacts with businesses with which he or she has contact personally as a customer. Referrals may come from others on the learning center staff or from friends and relatives.

The initial contact

Potential community contacts, like a job interviewer, are primarily interested in what advantages there are for him, his company, or his organization in cooperating with the center. The most effective approach, therefore, will be predicated on this premise. Variants of the following statement have proven to be effective:

> Good morning. My name is _____. I represent the Adult Division of the _____ Public Schools. Since your business is located in this school district (or community), I would like the opportunity to give you some detailed information about our adult learning center and explain some of the ways we may be able to be of assistance to you or your employees. Are you familiar with our center on _____ street?

At this point, the liaison may be asked to give information over the telephone and/or send some written materials. The liaison may send the materials and follow up with a telephone call, or try to arrange an appointment to bring the materials and meet with the potential contact in person. In this situation, the follow-up procedure is critically important. If materials are sent, rather than delivered, they may be put aside and forgotten. It is preferable to make a personal visit, by appointment, either to deliver written materials or to discuss them after they have been sent.

The fact that the liaison represents a division of the local school system seems to dispel mistrust. Most businesses like to cooperate with the public school system as part of their public relations policy. Once the program of establishing cooperative working relationships with community contacts is under way, you can mention other companies with which the center has developed linkages. The public image of a company is a sensitive area, and there will be a desire to "get on the bandwagon."

If the liaison is planning to approach a large employer, such as a factory, retail department store, or a hospital, it is highly desirable to find out whether the organization has an executive who is in charge of community relations. Many department stores have vice-presidents who are responsible for encouraging favorable community relations. Some bank officers and personnel directors also perform this function. A presentation to the president of a Chamber of Commerce, Merchant's Association, service organization, fraternal

organization, or similar group may open the gates to many further opportunities. The liaison may state willingness to address the group at a meeting. The organization may agree to provide a list of their members so that even those who do not attend meetings can receive some descriptive material about the center. The establishment and maintenance of cooperative relationships with the officers of such organizations is a great coup. They are often pleased to cooperate with the local school system, particularly if they both work and live in the community.

Securing commitments and following up

As each community contact is acquainted with the services of the center, the liaison will get a sense of the ways in which that company can be of benefit to the center. Some of the possibilities have been mentioned previously. Others will emerge from individual situations. Diplomacy and sensitivity are required in determining just how and when these possibilities should be discussed.

Verbal commitments must be followed by written confirmation. When the impact of a discussion or the enthusiasm for a plan is still strong, that is the time to obtain a formal commitment. It is sometimes difficult to say to a business person or personnel director, "Will you put that in writing?" However, it is quite acceptable to review orally the results of the discussion (to check the accuracy or your understanding) and then to write a letter outlining the agreement. You may request a letter in return confirming the plan.
For example, if a community contact promises to notify the liaison of job openings in the company which might be filled by learning center students, a follow-up letter confirming this offer should be written immediately. If the liaison has agreed to publicize job openings and pre-screen applicants, these facts should be included in a letter. A follow-up telephone call a month or two later is also appropriate if you have not heard from the contact.

If a community contact says that he/she will be glad to speak at a career night program or host a field trip, a letter requesting choice of dates should follow. Even when a speaker has agreed in writing to participate in an event, a follow-up telephone call just prior to the date is prudent. The approach to be used in the call should be carefully planned in advance to avoid giving the appearance of questioning the person's reliability. For example, the liaison might ask if the speaker will need any special equipment for the presentation, has a preference for any particular seating arrangement, or needs travel directions to the center.

Recording, reporting, and evaluating

Written documentation of all program activities and communications is important. The liaison is dealing with the community as a representative of the public school system. Records and reports are the best insurance against misunderstanding or distortion of fact.

Procedures for feedback and reporting between the liaison and the administrator should be discussed in the early planning stage. A series of monthly reports, followed by a yearly summary, is one system which works well. When a special event or cooperative arrangement with community contacts is being planned, it is important to share this information and receive feedback from the administrator. Written comunication is preferable whenever possible.

Records should be kept of all potential or actual community contacts. If space is limited, a card file may serve that purpose. Telephone and personal contacts should be summarized and dates recorded. If filing cabinet space is available, more detailed records can be

maintained, with each company and organization having its own folder. A special file for all job development activities is helpful. A sample of a form that has been used in organizing and keeping records on job placement is included here.

ADULT LEARNING CENTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

JOB ORDER - LIFE SKILLS PROGRAM

Name of organization _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Date _____

Contact _____

_____

Job description _____

_____

Applicant qualifications _____

_____

Recruitment procedures _____

_____

Prospective applicants _____

_____

Follow-up _____

_____

A "live bank" of vocational information resources in the community may be one of the goals of your program. Talking with someone who has expertise in a career field that interests a student is an excellent way for the student to gather up-to-date information. The community persons who agree to share their knowledge with students can sign a card to that effect. The cards, organized according to career area, can be filed and kept by the liaison or career counselor on staff. Students can then look up the names and telephone numbers of these resource persons and set up appointments. A sample card appears below.

NAME _____

BUSINESS NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

JOB TITLE _____

NATURE OF BUSINESS _____

I am willing to see students from the Life Skills Employability Workshops and serve as a vocational information resource.

DATE _____ SIGNATURE _____

Resource materials

When initiating a cooperative venture with the Chamber of Commerce, Merchant's Association, or any other organization, it is advantageous to reach as many members as possible with written material describing the adult learning center and its services. You may be able to obtain the membership list and permission to send out a mailing. You may even be able to negotiate an arrangement whereby the president will sign a letter written by the liaison, to be reproduced on the organization's stationery. A sample of a letter which has been used in this way appears below.

Dear Member:

Our community is fortunate in having a progressive adult education program. One of the areas recently brought to my attention is the _____ Adult Learning Center which offers a program I believe to be mutally beneficial to both employers and employees.

The _____ Adult Learning Center offers services to individuals in our area which increase not only their education proficiencies, but also their value as prospective employees in the community. The information enclosed will acquaint you with their services, and also offer you an opportunity to assist them in a very meaningful way.

I hope you will take a few minutes to read this material and to complete and return the enclosed postcard.

Sincerely,

President

Enclosures

In describing the learning center to a potential community contact, programs which increase the employability potential of the students should be emphasized. This refers not only to the general educational level and specific job skills, but also to workshops on decision-making, gathering career information, time management, etc. Business and professional persons are usually interested in hearing about programs such as the Adkins Life Skills Program which help adults become aware of the attitudes and work habits of valued employees, improve their job-hunting skills, and assist them in making intelligent vocational choices. They may be willing to assist with workshops and/or consider workshop "graduates" as potential employees.

A sample of a brochure which is used in a center where the Adkins program is offered is included here.

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